The Hour Between Dog and Wolf: How Risk Taking Transforms US, Body and Mind John Coates (2013)

Book's Argument: The body and brain experience hormonal changes when responding to stress - characterized by Coates as novelty, uncertainty, and uncontrollability. Using high-value stock trading as a backdrop - Coates was a Wall St. trader before studying physiology - he describes physiological responses taking place between the mind and body during periods of high stress.

Key Takeaways: The author contends that training the mind mirrors strength training in that both require cycles of stress and recovery. Instead of stacking weights though, one must increase psychological loading, followed by a processing period, to fine-tune

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our brain and nervous system. This exercise creates resilience in the face of novelty, uncertainty, and uncontrollability - three conditions which place the body in a "constant state of preparedness."

Best Quotes: "Desk managers now take to bullying juniors, hinting at changes to the [trading] desk, firing one or two people before the bank even announces layoffs. According to the primatologist Robert Sapolsky, dominant monkeys, when exposed to uncontrollable stressors, take to biting subordinates, an activity that horribly has the effect of lowering their cortisol levels, and managers, appearing to understand this ugly piece of physiology, offload their cortisol onto juniors, even the ones that are performing well."

"Some studies have even found that under conditions of extreme stress our prefrontal cortex is effectively taken offline, impairing analytic thought and leaving our brains to run on stored reactions, largely emotional and impulsive ones."

Quoting Daniel Kahneman, "Remember this rule: Intuition cannot be trusted in the absence of stable regularities in the environment."

Why it's important: Economically available technology exists that can monitor the creation (and dilution) of stress to enhance decision-making performance. The author suggests monitoring traders of high-end stocks, comparing them with "elite athletes" who routinely monitor their stress hormone levels to arrive at competitions during peak periods. The potential of routinely arriving at the peak of our performance level - whether at a battle or budget hearing - makes this book an important read.